



**Pelton Fell Parish Council: How a Community Governance Review Was  
Triggered In Pelton Fell, Durham**

## Headlines:

- The village of Pelton Fell is in the county of Durham, in the North East of England.
- This case study tells the story of how the Pelton Fell Community Partnership in Durham triggered a Community Governance Review (the process by which a new parish council is created) to create a new community council in its village.
- Pelton Fell Community Partnership gathered the required 250 signatures from local government electors in the Pelton Fell area, submitting the petition to the Durham County Unitary Council which subsequently triggered the Review.
- Outlined in this case study is how issues between the Pelton Fell Community Partnership and Durham County Unitary Council were overcome by building relationships through communicating with one another regularly, alongside regular advice from the County Durham and the National Associations of Local Councils (NALC).
- Currently (June, 2016) the Pelton Fell Community Partnership is awaiting the outcome of the process of the principal authority collating its feedback from residents; this process should conclude by June, 2016. A decision should be made by the end of June, 2016 By Durham Council as to whether a new community council can be created in Pelton Fell.
- The lessons learnt so far from this campaign are that principal local authorities should be held to account at all times during a Community Governance Review and that persuading enough residents and principal authority councillors of the benefits of creating a new local council are difficult to achieve and sustain.

Colin Reynolds, Campaign Champion from the Pelton Fell campaign said;

*“At the end of 2014, there were 842 houses for rating purposes and 1,241 electors in Pelton Fell. Its population was estimated as 1,613 in mid-2013. Existing facilities in the village include: a general store with post office; two doctor’s surgeries; pharmacy; community centre; war memorial park with tennis courts and bowling-green. At a time of huge county council cuts, a parish council could sustain many of these vital services in the village.”*

## Why A Council Is Wanted:

The campaign to create a new parish council in Pelton Fell began in 2014 when the Pelton Fell Community Partnership discovered the extent of cuts to public spending on local services from Durham Council in the Pelton Fell area. The Pelton Fell Community Partnership did not want residents in the village to suffer into the medium to longer term as a result of such cuts and so started to investigate other models of local governance which could provide sustainable delivery mechanisms for delivering such services and a parish council (of which there are already several in Durham) – met with much local support as a

concept early on. Existing facilities in Pelton Fell include: a general store with post office; two doctor's surgeries; pharmacy; community centre; a war memorial, a park with tennis courts and a bowling green. It was logical that a parish council would be campaigned for with the Pelton Fell Community Partnership leading the campaign as a parish council could manage the war memorial, the park, bowling-green and tennis courts and if needed take on the management of the Brockley Community Centre where the Partnership was based. These incentives initially persuaded enough residents to sign the campaign petition.

The campaign also coincided with the delivery of a national programme delivered with Department of Communities and Local Government funds by the National and County Associations of Local Councils (including County Durham Association of Local Councils). The programme promoted the creation of new parish councils in previously un-parished areas on England. The Community Partnership applied for a campaign grant later in 2014-15 to assist with campaign activities in the village to persuade residents of the benefits of creating a new parish council.

Residents in Pelton Fell also wanted a new parish council to give the area a stronger voice for their small village. They no longer wanted to feel powerless in discussions with Durham County Unitary Council in terms of future service cuts to Pelton Fell as a village. Also the creation of a parish council could bring further un-planned for benefits such as the adoption of new assets which could no longer be managed by Durham Council and the delivery of services formerly delivered by Durham Council (it had the legal power to deliver) again in the face of public spending cuts. Parish councils are statutory, and usually permanent, democratically elected bodies –so the creation of a new parish council in Pelton Fell would also lend sustainability to new and ongoing service delivery in the village. Recently, new parish councils have been formed in Sutton Coldfield, Bingley and Kidderminster – all communities of a different size – and campaigners from Pelton Fell had the opportunity to network with these other campaign groups at events organised by the National Association of Local Councils in 2015-16.

*“Community councils have a huge range of powers to deliver services and manage assets in their areas. For Pelton Fell, this model will work well to: develop and continue good relationships with local businesses; manage open spaces and campaign for and deliver better local services and facilities such as the Brockwell community centre, War Memorial Park and Congburn Wood; and ensure local peoples' priorities are considered by government and other appropriate organisations.”*

– Colin Reynolds, Pelton Fell Campaign Champion.

### **Demographics and Next Steps With The Campaign:**

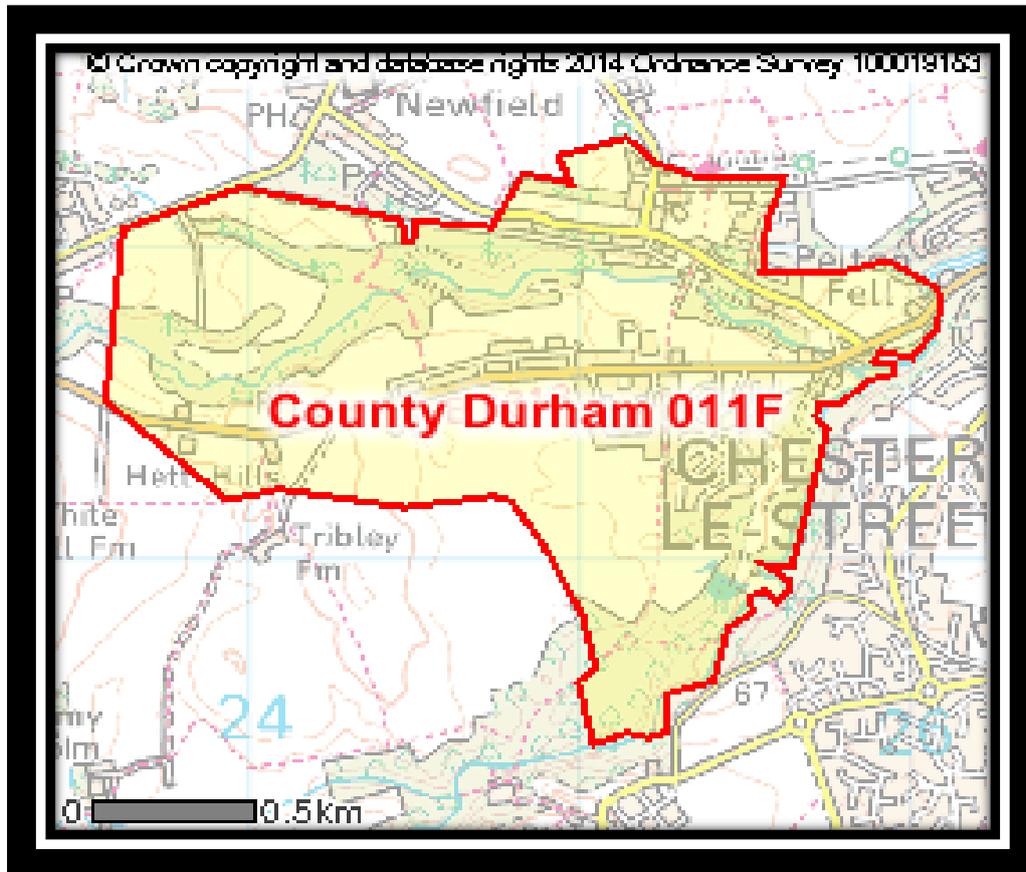
Until 2009, Pelton Fell had been a ward in the Chester le District Council approximated by the Lower Super Output Area referenced as County Durham 011F. In electoral terms it is



now part of the Chester le Street West and Central ward of the Durham County Council, a Unitary Authority formed in 2009.

Once a Community Governance Review has ended – and resulted in the principal authority agreeing the creation of a new parish council – an election date is then set. A temporary or shadow council is usually then set up to agree reporting and a first budget with the principal authority which can be agreed at the first Full Council meeting of the parish council. The Pelton Fell Community Governance Review needs to end legally by September, 2016.

Pelton Fell is a village in County Durham, England. It is situated a short distance to the north-west of Chester-le-Street. The village is a post-industrial colliery settlement. There is a history in the village of residents feeling un-empowered and not consulted enough by developers or Durham Council during housing developments. A council sponsored redevelopment of the village began in 2004, with a significant number of council houses, and a small number of private houses, demolished to make way for more modern accommodation, which is to be a mix of social housing and private housing (see: [http://peltonfell.org.uk/pelton\\_fell\\_history.php?page\\_id=3&id=107](http://peltonfell.org.uk/pelton_fell_history.php?page_id=3&id=107) ). Residents and the Community Partnership felt angered at the lack of consultation before the houses formerly on the new housing site had been demolished. This experience has been a major reason why residents and the Community Partnership have sought a new and different style of governance in their community as they are aware that the Community Partnership itself cannot access some funding a parish council can and does not have the statutory right to be notified of planning applications as does a parish council. So it was hoped that a parish council would prevent repeats of such lack of consultation by Durham Council during similar development applications again in the future.



Above: a boundary map of the proposed area of a new Pelton Fell Community Council.

### Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

The main campaign group to create a new parish council in Pelton Fell has been the Pelton Fell Community Partnership. The Community Partnership delivered the below campaign activity in the village during 2014-15;

- Creation of a Community Council Leaflet – revised in April 2014 and March 2015;
- Drafted the proposal for a community council - a consultation document was circulated in 2015 (and then published as a double-sided Z folded pamphlet – printed externally);
- Creation of a petition form;
- Drafted and issued a letter to Durham County Council;
- Drafted and issued a Community Governance Review update to all residents of Pelton Fell which was issued in Autumn, 2014; &
- Drafted and issued a letter to petition supporters.

The County Durham Association of Local Councils accessed DCLG funding during 2015 from the NALC which helped to progress campaign activity with the production of campaign leaflets, Pelton Fell Community Partnership newsletters and a campaign Facebook page.

The National Association of Local Councils campaign funded the County Durham Association of Local Councils and the Pelton Fell Community Partnership; this funding was instrumental in both triggering the Community Governance Review and helping to communicate the benefits of a parish council to Pelton Fells residents. The Department for Communities and Local Government assisted by providing the funding via the National Association to disburse to both the Durham Association (top cover officer time) as well as the Pelton Fell Community Partnership (for the production of leaflets and similar materials).

## **Progress With The Campaign To Date:**

The Pelton Fell Community Partnership has delivered so far an effective campaign to create a new parish council in Pelton Fell. It was the body which gathered the petitionary signatures and it was the body in 2015 which submitted the petition to County Durham Unitary Council. The County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) was of great assistance in helping advise the Community Partnership during every stage of the campaign. Both the County Durham Association of Local Councils and the National Association of Local Councils advised on technical issues around the Community Governance Review (in particular when it appeared as though the campaign would not result favourably for the campaign group). Advice was also given as to how to navigate the political minefield with Durham County Unitary Council during the different phases of the Review (in particular during the final referendum stage in 2016)

However, despite Durham County Council's receptive policy of creating parish councils, in a time of austerity the councillors on Durham County Council increasingly began to question whether the creation of another layer of local government was the right model at the time. And yet - with the help of the Government funding issued by the National Association, the campaign group were able to overcome this through using various communications tools (detailed below) in helping both the community and County Council understand why the establishment of a new council was indeed the best option to take.



Above: an aerial view of the village of Pelton Fell, Durham.

## Overcoming Political Challenges:

The initial challenge of Pelton Fell until 2009 being a ward in the Chester le District Council – was overcome with the creation of the new Durham County Unitary Council in the same year. In electoral terms, it is now part of the Chester le Street West and Central Ward of the Durham County Council – a Unitary Authority formed in 2009. This has undoubtedly helped the community define its own locality, laying solid foundations for the creation of a local council by giving the area a strong local identity on a ward basis

The Community Partnership revised its Creation of a Community Council leaflet in both April 2014 and March 2015. This was followed by a proposal for a Community Council - Consultation document circulated in 2015. These communications helped to define the parish boundary of the intended parish council for the village. The Pelton Fell campaign group then issued a petition form and then a further letter to Durham County Council. The Community Governance Review leaflet was issued in early October, 2015, followed by a further letter to petition supporters. These funded communications continuously drove home to both Durham Council and residents the benefits for all concerned of the creation of a new community council for Pelton Fell. Once the benefits were understood by residents this made the job of selling the defined parish boundary much easier. However, it does seem that the first phase of the campaign – gathering petition signatures – was much easier for the campaign group – than the latter (more difficult) phase of persuading Durham Council to create a new parish council.

*“DCLG funding through NALC was critical in allowing the Community Partnership to produce leaflets, hold public meetings and communicate to residents the need for a new community council and the associated benefits.”*

– Steve Ragg, County Durham Association of Local Councils.



Caption: The Brockwell Centre, home of Pelton Fell Community Partnership.

### **How Was Progress Made So Far?:**

The Pelton Fell Community Partnership was responsible for driving the campaign to secure resident signatures in addition to triggering the Community Governance Review in Durham. Resident buy-in was secured through regular leaflet communications on the benefits, also. This constant information flow was largely also due to the County Durham Association of Local Councils' regular two way communication with the National Association of Local Councils and the accessing of funding for the Community Partnership.

The campaign group was successful in securing coverage of the campaign in the local online press

([http://m.chesterlestreetadvertiser.co.uk/news/13803927.Proposals\\_for\\_community\\_council\\_for\\_Pelton\\_Fell\\_takes\\_a\\_step\\_forward/](http://m.chesterlestreetadvertiser.co.uk/news/13803927.Proposals_for_community_council_for_Pelton_Fell_takes_a_step_forward/)) and this gave residents across the Durham area a better idea also of the advantages of the creation of a new local council.

The campaign group was led by the Pelton Fell Community Partnership which had some resource for the campaign and was also able to access the central government funding cited above. Using its resource the campaign group was able to progress the campaign in the below ways;

- By submitting the application by PFCP to Durham County Council for a Community Governance Review;
- By securing Durham Council's agreement to, and a programme for the Review – June/September 2016; &
- By confirming that the council would make the final decision on its Review by July 2016.

### **Recommendations For Other Campaign Groups Based On Learning:**

Campaigners recognise that it is one thing to submit a petition, but quite another to steer a successful campaign through a principal authority (even one with a pro-parish creation policy such as Durham Council), during the second phase of a Community Governance Review. The Pelton Fell campaign group also shared their lessons learnt during a presentation given at a National Association of Local Councils event in Sutton Coldfield in January, 2016. The main recommendation the campaign group for other campaign groups based on their experience is to have a long term campaign plan and to have a communications plan in place for the Community Governance Review phase of a campaign.



**Who Can I Contact?:**

**Campaign Champion: Colin Reynolds** [chair@peltonfell.org.uk](mailto:chair@peltonfell.org.uk) / 0181 389 3399.

**Steve Ragg of CDALC:** [cdalc@durham.gov.uk](mailto:cdalc@durham.gov.uk) / 03000 269 921.

**Other Information:**

**More information on creating a Council: The NALC 'Create a Council' web page:**

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

**To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:**

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

**More information on creating a council: The NALC's Create a Council web page -**

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

**The NALC's Power To The People resource here -** <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .

**Pelton Fell Community Partnership -**

[http://peltonfell.org.uk/pelton\\_fell\\_history.php?page\\_id=3&id=107](http://peltonfell.org.uk/pelton_fell_history.php?page_id=3&id=107) .

**County Durham Association of Local Councils -** <http://www.cdalc.info/Pages/Home.aspx> .